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U.N. COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

SPECIAL SESSION ON RWANDA

STATEMENT

BY

MS. GERALDINE FERRARO

HEAD OF UNITED STATES DELEGATION
TO THE SPECIAL SESSION ON RWANDA

May 24, 1994

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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MR. CHAIRMAN, IT IS SADLY IRONIC THAT TODAY, AFRICA DAY, WE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE BY A HORROR. THE SYSTEMATIC SLAUGHTER IN RWANDA TAXES THE IMAGINATION. SINCE APRIL 6, OVER 200,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED IN A FRENZY OF POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND POSSIBLE ACTS OF GENOCIDE. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS MORE HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST BRING SOLACE TO THE SUFFERING POPULATION OF RWANDA. TO THIS END, MY DELEGATION FULLY SUPPORTS AND IS ADVOCATING AN EXPANDED UNAMIR PRESENCE, WHICH WOULD PROTECT PLACES OF REFUGE AND DISPLACED PERSONS IN DIRE DANGER AS WELL AS PROVIDE SECURITY FOR HUMANITARIAN AID TO RWANDA'S SICK AND HUNGRY. SUCH AN INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE MIGHT CURB, BY ITS WITNESS, THE HUMAN RIGHTS EXCESSES WE SEE BEING COMMITTED IN THIS VIOLENT CONFLICT. THE FORCE COMPONENT OF THIS INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE COULD PROVIDE THE SECURITY SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS SEVERAL IMMEDIATE TASKS: TO STOP THE KILLING, ACHIEVE A CEASE-FIRE, PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN RELIEF, FACILITATE MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS, AND ASSIST IN INVESTIGATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ATROCITIES. BUT THE WORLD COMMUNITY MUST ALSO CONSIDER STEPS THAT WILL PERMIT LONG-TERM RECONCILIATION, AND REPAIR THE DAMAGE THAT THIS CARNAGE HAS DONE TO THE MORAL AND LEGAL FABRIC OF OUR WORLD.

THIS IS WHY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT STRONGLY SUPPORTED HIGH COMMISSIONER AYALA LASO'S RECOMMENDATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S CALL FOR THIS SPECIAL SESSION, AND WHY WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH ALL OF YOU TO DO WHAT WE MUST AT THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT. WE COMMAND THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HIS COURAGEOUS VISIT TO RWANDA EARLIER THIS MONTH.

AS THE FIRST STEPS ARE TAKEN TOWARDS THE RESTORATION OF ORDER AND PEACE IN RWANDA, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE ORIGINS OF THIS CARNAGE AND THE IDENTITIES OF ITS PERPETRATORS. WE MUST RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SEE THE SLAUGHTER IN RWANDA AS A CONFLICT WITH ROOTS BURIED SO DEEP IN HISTORY THAT THEY CANNOT BE REACHED BY DIPLOMACY AND STATECRAFT TODAY.

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TO BE SURE THERE ARE ETHNIC DIMENSIONS TO THIS CONFLICT. YET IF YOU VISIT THE REFUGEE CAMPS WHERE RWANDANS HAVE FOUND REFUGE BY THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, YOU WILL SEE HUTUS AND TUTSIS LIVING SIDE BY SIDE, VICTIMS OF THE SAME TRAGEDY. THIS IS, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS A POLITICAL CONFLICT, INFAMED BY POLITICAL ACTORS WHO ARE EXPLOITING UNDERLYING ETHNIC TENSIONS FOR POLITICAL ENDS. IT WAS PEOPLE SEEKING POWER WHO TOOK TO THE AIRWAVES AND CALLED FOR VIOLENCE AND SENT KILLING GANGS INTO VILLAGES. THE PEOPLE OF RWANDA MUST BE ALLOWED TO RECONSTRUCT THEIR LIVES AND SOCIETY, TO FORGIVE IF THEY CAN, CERTAINLY TO RECONCILE THEMSELVES TO EACH OTHER. BUT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS CATASTROPHE MUST BE IDENTIFIED AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS. INDEED, ONLY IF THEY ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE WILL THE RWANDAN PEOPLE BE ABLE TO RESTORE SOCIAL HARMONY IN THEIR COUNTRY.

IN ADDITION TO THE VITAL TASK OF PROTECTING THOSE STILL EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST INVESTIGATE AND ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE ATROCITIES, THESE MASSIVE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS INCLUDING POSSIBLE ACTS OF GENOCIDE, BECAUSE THE SLAUGHTER IN RWANDA IS, ABOVE ALL, A HUMAN RIGHTS CATASTROPHE. IT IS THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL AMBITION UNRESTRAINED BY LAW OR PROCESS, OF ETHNIC TENSION AND RIVALRY EXPLOITED FOR CYNICAL AND MURDEROUS ENDS, AND IS A DIRECT AND POWERFUL CHALLENGE TO THE MOST BASIC, FUNDAMENTAL STANDARDS OF HUMANKIND. IF WE FAIL TO ACT, IT WILL SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT FOR EVERY REGION OF THE WORLD WHERE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PEOPLES TRY TO COEXIST.

WE NOTE THAT THE SECURITY COUNCIL, THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, GENERAL DALLAIRE AND HIS STAFF AND FORCES, THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BOOH-BOOH HAVE ALREADY MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADDRESS THIS MULTIFACETED DISASTER. WE MUST ALSO COMMEND THE EFFORTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN PROTECTING CIVILIANS AND DISPLACED PERSONS INSIDE RWANDA.

THE U.S. WILL CONTINUE TO DO OUR PART. WE ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO JOIN US IN DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS WITH BOTH SIDES AND IN SUPPORT OF THE EFFORTS BY GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION TO RESURRECT THE ARUSHA PROCESS. WE STRONGLY SUPPORT THE U.N. RESOLUTION PLACING AN ARMS EMBARGO ON RWANDA AS WELL AS AUTHORIZING EXPANSION OF UNAMIR TO FACILITATE BRINGING HUMANITARIAN AID AND PROTECTION TO THREATENED CIVILIAN POPULATIONS. SINCE THE TRAGIC CRASH THAT TOOK THE LIVES OF PRESIDENTS HABYARIMANA AND NTARYAMIRA, THE UNITED STATES HAS PROVIDED NEARLY 50 MILLION DOLLARS IN HUMANITARIAN RELIEF TO THE SUB-REGION, ALONG WITH REPEATED U.S. AIRLIFTS OF AID SUPPLIES. WE CALL ON ALL GOVERNMENTS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY CAN DO IN SUPPORT OF HUMANITARIAN RELIEF OPERATIONS.

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IN ADDITION TO POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION, HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AND PROGRAMS MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF ANY AND EVERY U.N. ACTION TAKEN ON RWANDA, BECAUSE ONLY BY A RESOLUTE FOCUS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSION OF THIS HORROR, OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF EVERY RWANDAN MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD, WILL THE PARTIES, AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, BE ABLE TO FORGE A WORKABLE END TO THE FIGHTING THAT WILL CARRY OVER INTO THE FUTURE. HIGH COMMISSIONER AYALA LASSO'S ROLE AS COORDINATOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES THROUGHOUT THE U.N. SYSTEM IS OF COURSE VITAL IN THIS REGARD.

SPECIFICALLY, THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR, WHO, WITH THE AID OF THE UN'S THEMATIC RAPPORTEURS, WILL INVESTIGATE THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN RWANDA, AND REPORT FINDINGS BACK TO THE COMMISSION WITHIN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMISSION TO AUTHORIZE ADVISORY SERVICES FOR RWANDA AS SOON AS THE SITUATION PERMITS. AND WE CALL FOR THE IMMEDIATE DISPATCH OF A TEAM OF HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS OPERATING UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UN. NOT ONLY WILL THE MONITORS GATHER INFORMATION ON THE GROUND; THEIR VERY PRESENCE WILL FACILITATE THE NEGOTIATIONS AS PARTIES WILL MORE WILLINGLY LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS IF THEY ARE UNDER INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY.

GATHERING INFORMATION IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. OUR GOAL MUST BE INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, IN RWANDA AND ELSEWHERE, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AS WE SIT HERE TODAY, OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION REFUGEES FROM RWANDA ARE HUDDLED IN TANZANIA ALONE. CORPSES STILL FLOAT DAILY DOWN THE KAGERA RIVER. WE MUST SEIZE THIS MOMENT TO REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT TO THE UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, TO THE RENUNCIATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND ETHNIC HATRED. WE MUST FIX RESPONSIBILITY ON THOSE WHO HAVE DIRECTED THESE ACTS OF VIOLENCE. IN SO DOING WE CAN TRANSFORM REVENGE INTO JUSTICE, AFFIRM THE RULE OF LAW, AND BRING THIS HORRIBLE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE TO A MERCIFUL CLOSE.

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